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BOSTON CORRESPONDENCE.

FOXCROFT COLE AND HIS SCHOOL—CHARMS OF THE ISLE AU HAUT—COMING ART EVENTS.

BOSTON, September 1, 1884.

IF there be such a thing in existence to-day as a "Boston school," or cult, of painting, it is to be found, undoubtedly, in the little knot of artists who look to Mr. J. Foxcroft Cole, as artists always must look to some one, for their mentor. Not that Mr. Cole is a great or masterful man—even in the comparative sense that the late William M. Hunt was great among his fellows and looked to as a counsellor and leader. He is simply a sound and sincere man with an ingrained hatred for shams and affectation, and an instant penetration of pretension and inflation. Quiet and reserved, almost repellant to strangers, he is not effusive even to his friends. He simply convinces and attaches them by his discriminating criticism, his cool earnestness, his shrewd Yankee business talent, his solid Puritan self-respect. He is ever impressing upon his fellow-artists their right and their power to avoid painting their hearts out for the benefit of dealers or other Philistines. As a painter, he is a follower, with a sturdy independence of his own, of the modern French school of landscape. He has studied it faithfully in its own country, in its ateliers and amid its veritable scenery and atmosphere. He knows, besides, the galleries, shops and auctions of Paris, London, and other art-centres of Europe. Grafted in him upon Puritan stock, the French nature-worship develops with a less luxuriant but scarcely less beautiful growth of form, and perhaps even more wholesome, natural fruit, if with less richness of color and fragrance of motif in the style. His landscapes with cattle never cry after you from the walls of the exhibition room, but so long as you may live with one of them it will have continually something true and sweet of nature to tell you, like the landscape spread beneath your home window. To the superficial or unsympathetic observation, his pictures seem oftentimes dull, prosaic, sober-sided, even gloomy, like the scenery of much of the New England seaboard. To a deeper insight this is the very charm of them—the serious, sacrificing, characteristic devotion to truth of the sober-minded New Englander. There is a greater value than beauty in landscape-painting—just as there is, according to Richard Wagner, a greater value in music than pleasure—and that is truth. So at least we find it with our long-ripening and tardily-born but very intense and earnest consciousness of art in Puritan-bred New England. As Cole is in his personal characteristics, physical and mental, a Yankee of the Yankees, so in his art he is a Puritan of the Puritans. He can draw deep delight from the beauty of the world like John Milton, but he will do it ever decorously and with sobriety and scholarly elegance, like the Puritan poet.

It is the sober-sidedness which makes the art of the best of his set "caviare to the general," and some of them have broken through it and cast it away to gain popular success, but always distinctly to their loss and cost in the grieved opinion of "the judicious." There is Appleton Brown, who may almost be said to have plunged into "riotous living" in excess of luxuriant effects made up out of too, too lush greens with absolutely black shadows, or of impossible glories of yellow sunlight or of too pretty sweetness of exaggerated masses of apple-blossoms. There is, too, John B. Johnston, who sometimes lets his inherited comic faculty (he is the son of the caricaturist Johnston, who was a sort of Cruikshank in Boston thirty or forty years ago) run away with him in his wonderful delineation of cow-life. One of his friends in the Paint and Clay Club once caricatured Johnston by painting a cow twisting her tongue several times around a bunch of grass as if in an epicurean ecstasy over a particularly delicious and succulent mouthful. This skit was the work of another of the Cole set, his favorite pupil and perhaps the most perfect as well as most promising representative of his style, George C. Wasson. Young Wasson (who is a son of the Rev. D. A. Wasson, the eminent radical Unitarian divine) does for the waters of the New England coast what Cole has done for its meadows and pastures. His color has the same characteristics as Cole's—sobriety and truth. He has the same manly simplicity and disdain of theatric effects—the same searching for the heart of things. He reproduces the sentiment of scenes without a trace of

suspicion of sentimentality. He paints a clumsy coasting schooner in a way to raise a bunch in the throat of one native to the old shores of Massachusetts and Maine. He revels in a north-east storm, with fishing-smacks weathering it out at anchor or battling it in dreary and gloomy persistency under reefed sails, and the waves running in dirty gray white-caps, as other painters revel in gorgeous sunsets. His shades of greens for the sea in all its moods are equalled only by the accuracy of his greens for the weather-beaten paint or striping on the hulls of Down-East schooners or Nova Scotia "pinkies." There is a sincerity and straightforwardness about his studies of such subjects that result in pathos as pure and touching as that in Millet's peasants. Here is Cole's soberness of truth, again, relied on to good purpose—a modest and faithful study, leaving the results to truth to work out quite in the old Puritan fashion.

Wasson is trusting in God and keeping his canvas as dry as he can in his housekeeping yacht moored in the Isle au Haut thoroughfare this summer. It would not be strange if his work there should bring other artists to so fine a field for marine studies, and indeed for landscape too, for the Isle au Haut is, as the name given it by the Sieur Champlain or some other old French explorer would indicate, almost a mountain. It is not so lofty as Mount Desert, which lies on its northern horizon, but its green ridge, rising in graceful slopes from the deep Atlantic surge, is very imposing and impressive in its height. Besides the decayed little fishing village in the thoroughfare and hamlets in its coves, less populous now than a hundred years ago, there is wild woodland scenery to paint and a gem of a mountain lake three miles long and half a mile wide. The romantic simplicity and isolation that artists find inspiring there cannot long be preserved against the Queen Anne cottage, for this great "Isle of the Hill" has gone the way that all the islands on that coast are going, into the hands of a company of capitalists who are to make another Mount Desert of it. But, however, they may "improve" it, nature's bold architecture can never be remodelled, neither in its own heights, nor in those of the islands which make up its entourage, nor in the scroll-like outline of the Camden Hills to the west, which must forever look, as now, as though at some word of command three rolling, breaking waves had stood still.

Until the summer's harvest from such fields is garnered into the galleries in the cities, art news must remain scanty. In another week, however, the great industrial fairs of this city will be open with their art galleries and their ruck of art odds and ends raked together from heaven knows where, with a topping of really interesting work. The valuable part of the art exhibition at the Mechanics' Fair will be a collection of the Americans' pictures in the Salon of 1884. This certainly will be worth coming on to see. At the rival fair is promised the immense Bouguereau, "Nymphs at the Bath," and one or two more famous old "chevaux de bataille," besides a collection of portraits representative of each epoch of the American practice of portrait-art.

Speaking of portraits, that of Lady Playfair, wife of Sir Lyon Playfair, who is the daughter of a citizen of Boston, has been painted by Sargent (Carolus Duran's brilliant pupil), and a sight of it has been promised to Boston the coming winter. The last portrait by Sargent exhibited here, that of a young girl holding a flower in her hand outstretched in a quaint gesture, created a genuine enthusiasm among our connoisseurs—was indeed the crown of one of our best museum exhibitions.

GRETA.

HANS MAKART.

THE news that Hans Makart, the great Austrian painter, has been pronounced insane may be no surprise to those who are acquainted with his habits of working. He has been, it is said, very irregular, and, like many of the foremost men of both the Munich and the Austrian schools, he has depended a great deal upon what is sometimes called "inspiration"—that is, upon momentary impulse, which he endeavored to prolong and sustain by means which are only too commonly abused without any such excuse. Although Makart did not go so far as some of his countrymen and certain pupils of theirs also, who habitually exhaust themselves on an eye or a nose and finish their work only in a perfunctory way, still his

best paintings show a lack of serious preparation. The composition is usually a jumble; relations of tones and values are often false, and it is generally plain that the effect of the picture has been left pretty much to chance and to the painter's ability to make something out of a bad mess. With this lack of method, let there be given an overweening ambition, and a course of life not remarkable, even in Vienna, for austerity, and a slight derangement of the intellects may be looked for almost as a matter of course.

The physicians who have Herr Makart in charge do not think that his malady is incurable. The accounts which have come to hand of its symptoms would show it to be an ordinary case of hallucination which it would hardly be correct to describe as madness. He thinks his head is a color-box and is greatly troubled and perplexed by his inability to make use of the pigments which he imagines it contains, and which, if he could put them upon canvas, he believes would enable him to paint the most glowing pictures ever seen. It appears that the malady has been for some time in progress, and that his failure to contribute to the late international exhibition at Munich, where Austrian art was very poorly represented, was due, at least in part to it. His friends, as soon as the symptoms became marked, sent him under medical care to a watering-place in the Bavarian Highlands, where the medicinal qualities of the baths are said to be having a very good effect.

The incident has brought out depreciatory remarks as to Makart's merits as an artist, which do not seem well founded. He has been accused of a want of imagination, of a willingness to do all sorts of work to order, of grossness of treatment, and muddy color. This last accusation, is surely based on a misconception if none of the others are. And, as to want of imagination, it is extremely hazardous for writers who have no practical acquaintance with the artistic life—who never attempted to express their thoughts pictorially—to make such an averment. A painter's imagination may express itself in a hundred ways which to the unprofessional observer would show but flat realism, or results that would seem to him ordinary studio effects. Then there are as many kinds of imagination as there are human beings, and even geniuses do not always comprehend one another.

I remember standing in company with Thomas Moran before the two great paintings in which Makart has typified the abundance of the waters and of the earth, when they were first brought to New York several years ago. What Moran was particularly struck with was not so much the glorious color, nor the intricate, and, in places, masterly composition; but the wonderful fertility of ideas, of expedients which displayed itself in every square foot of the two great canvases. "There is as much invention both of motives and of means," said he, "in one of these pictures as would suffice for half a dozen ordinary decorative canvases of their size, and yet each makes a distinct and united impression." Now, it is held to be the principal work of the imagination to bind or fuse together elements not naturally related; and it seems to me that is what Moran credited Makart with having done in this instance.

Of the other pictures of Makart which are in this country, the well-known "Diana and her Nymphs" is a wonderful triumph of coloring, only falling short of the work of such masters as Delacroix. This picture which is owned by Mr. Banker, of Irvington, N. Y., is held by many to be Makart's best work. There are one or two single figure pieces among us which do not approach it and which are perhaps open to the accusation made against Makart's works in general—that they are muddy in color.

But in the same article in which these charges are made, Makart is saddled with the responsibility for quite a number of paintings which are generally credited to another man—Munkacsy. "The Visit to the Baby," the "Christ before Pilate," and the "Milton and his Daughters," of which the last is in the Lenox Library Collection, are referred to as examples of Makart's manner. Perhaps the mistake, which is here quite evident, runs through the entire article. That would account for the writer's apparent want of discrimination in characterizing Makart's work as muddy and coarse or heavy. But what a curious blunder! And then, there are very many persons who will not admit that Munkacsy is deficient in imagination.

R. R.